

## APPENDIX A

### LEO STRAUSS: “CONSPECTIVISM” (1929)<sup>1</sup>

*Translated by Anna Schmidt and Martin D. Yaffe*

Conspectivism, the greatest power within present-day philosophy, is not a “direction [of thought],”<sup>2</sup> as materialism, positivism, idealism, etc., are “directions [of thought].” It is, rather, a method or a style. In the previous century, the effort arose to dissolve philosophy into the history of philosophy. This effort is continued by conspectivism and transformed into a new effort. Both efforts presuppose that a naive, head-on attack on the problems has been overcome. This overcoming has its basis in the consciousness “that man ... after a development so long, full of sacrifice and heroic, has reached the highest stage of consciousness.”<sup>3</sup> At this high stage, the attempt to solve the problems is out of the question. But while in the previous century one was still so naively reflective as to deny the problems altogether, conspectivism is full of the reflectively reflective knowledge that there are problems—hard, perhaps insoluble problems; it sees its very task in awakening and sharpening the sense of the problematic; but it does not itself solve the problems;

<sup>1</sup> [Leo Strauss, “*Konspektivismus*,” GS-2 365–75, 620–21.] Unpublished. Typescript of 13 pages with autograph entries and corrections in ink and pencil. Page 1 dated by Strauss in handwriting: “1929.” Leo Strauss Papers, Box 8, Folder 3, Department of Special Collections, University of Chicago Library {HM}.

Strauss’s essay is a book review (unpublished) of Karl Mannheim, *Ideologie und Utopie* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1929). All page numbers in parentheses in Strauss’s text are to this volume (see note 4). Emphases in Strauss’s quotations from Mannheim are Strauss’s own.

The English translation, *Ideology and Utopia*, by Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1936) is inexact and hence useless for helping readers understand Strauss’s criticism of Mannheim.

Strauss himself coins the term *Konspektivismus* with a polemical intention. In “Religious Situation of the Present” (appendix B), which appropriates words and phrases and even a full sentence from “*Konspektivismus*,” Strauss associates this coinage with three synonyms: the German *Zusammenschau* (“synopsis,” “overview”), the Greek σύνοψις, and the Latin *conspectio* (GS-2 382, with page 428, below).

<sup>2</sup> Strauss writes “*Richtung*” (“direction”). The German word “*Denkrichtung*” (“direction of thought” or “school of thought”) seems to be implied.

<sup>3</sup> [Handwritten note in the upper margin of the typescript:] All citations derive from Mannheim’s *Ideologie und Utopie*. {HM}

it does not even attempt to solve them; but it keeps the option open to solve them in the future, perhaps in the near future, the next time, so to speak; in short, it replaces the solution of the problems and the denial of the problems by the wrestling with the problems.

The progress from naive reflectiveness to reflective reflectiveness has the result that philosophy creates for itself a new subject matter. Naively reflective philosophy dissolved into the history of philosophy; it dismembered the philosophies of the past; reflectively reflective philosophy occupies itself exclusively with the {366} philosophy of the present. Now the return to earlier standpoints is at times still indispensable even today; but the admirable division of labor that corresponds to the high stage now reached allows the thinker of the present to entrust to the historians the providing of access to the past. Let us take the example that a conspectivist spirit<sup>4</sup> finds itself prompted to deal with the problem of utopia; it learns that Thomas Münzer is of very great significance for the history of utopia; the conspectivist spirit will then take up the pertinent literature, especially Holl's essay on Luther and the visionaries,<sup>5</sup> and obtain from it an exhaustive knowledge of the facts of the case. This procedure is unobjectionable. For even if the limitedness of the historian compels us to be greatly suspicious about his *value judgments*, the historian's objectivity allows the user to gain a reliable overview of the *facts* from the documents drawn on by the historian. Meanwhile, as already indicated, the conspectivist thinker is only occasionally dependent on the historian; usually he occupies himself with present-day phenomena that need not be imparted by a third party. We can now attempt a first definition of conspectivism: conspectivism does not deal directly with the problems, as naive philosophy does; nor with the history of philosophy, as does naively reflective philosophy; but exclusively with the philosophy of the present.

The moment conspectivism constitutes itself, new horizons open up that were completely unknown to earlier generations. We point here only to the bottomless problematic that lies in conspectivism itself. We said that it concerned itself only with present-day philosophy. What happens if *all* present-day philosophers are conspectivist thinkers? This possibility does not bear contemplating; but that its realization is imminent is not to be doubted. If we see correctly, then the encounter and dialogue of conspectivist thinkers will become the theme and method of philosophy. But, as has been said, for now we are not there yet. For now, there are still a number of more naive spirits who deal with the problems directly. That is why for now the conspectivist thinker still has the possibility of concerning himself with naive philosophers, of moving back and forth among these philosophers. This movement is called dialectics. Dialectics is the preliminary stage of the encounter and dialogue, thus the preliminary stage to the stage at which the {367} conspectivist thinkers will be completely among themselves. Having reached this stage, the

<sup>4</sup>The German is *Geist*, which can mean either "spirit," "mind," or "intellect." As an adjective, *geistig* can mean "intellectual" or "referring to the intellect," as in Strauss's lecture title "The Intellectual [*geistige*] Situation of the Present" (appendix C).

<sup>5</sup>Karl Holl, "Luther und die Schwärmer," *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Kirchengeschichte* (3 vols.; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1927), 420ff.

spirit will have reached its being in-and-for-itself; the truth of the spirit in itself will unveil itself in the conspectivist spirit. In the Socratic dialogue taking place among Graf Keyserlingk, Peter Wust, Arthur Liebert, Margarete Susmann et al., philosophy's initial situation is being recreated at a higher stage.

The victory parade of conspectivism is not to be slowed by reactionary spirits repeatedly shouting slogans like "To the things themselves!" "Back to the sources!" etc. Imbued with the consciousness that everything effective at present is of equal value, conspectivism incorporates thoroughness dialectically into its own position; it transforms the naive thoroughness into a thoroughness of a higher order. The fact that even the conspectivist thinkers raise the demand for philological precision and methodological exactness shows clearly how comfortably thoroughness can be integrated into conspectivist thinking.

Since these remarks have the purpose of introducing the reader to conspectivism, this may be the right moment for some brief information about the most natural mode of access to the conspectivist writings. The novice should not be deterred by all the talk about wrestling in these writings; he must keep in mind that wrestling can be a beautiful, indeed a graceful, gesture. He best begins by reading the literary and entertainment supplements included in the widely distributed democratic newspapers. Here he becomes acquainted effortlessly with the first concepts; he thus spares himself the time-consuming detour via the naive problems and via the history of philosophy; he learns how positions that took a decade or longer to establish are overturned or even dispensed with within a few minutes by a few clever moves, using dashes, question marks, and exclamation points; in this manner he understands from the start the powerful progress in technical thinking that the conspectivist methods have brought; he learns to apply these methods himself without difficulty. Trained in this way, he advances to the reading of conspectivist periodicals, pamphlets, and books; these writings he easily recognizes by titles such as: "Currents of Present-Day Thought"; "New Ways of (or to) Philosophy"; "Spirit and World of Dialectics"; "The Resurrection of Metaphysics"; "Thinkers of the Time"; etc. Once he has educated himself with the help of these classic works, he can then turn to the precon-spectivist writings and gradually apply himself to {368} processing them dialectically by writing essays, pamphlets, and books.

If a naïf has, with strenuous labor, gained a concept for himself, has thought it through to the end "with unsparing ruthlessness even toward himself," has put his thoughts on paper, and, finally, published them for whatever reasons, then anyone is free to read his book. How someone reads it depends on what kind of human being he is. If he is narrowminded and has a "categorical apparatus" at hand, then he will cast the book aside: as "metaphysical," if he is a positivist; as "psychological," if he is a Neo-Kantian; as "un-existential," if he is an adherent of the religious-metaphysical renewal movement. But if he is open to everything new, if he is hence predestined for conspectivism, then he notices that the book contains a word of the future. In this case—and this case alone is of public interest—the following will then happen: the attentive reader incorporates the new word into his vocabulary; he reads other books, of which one or the other may be as significant as the first book taken as our example; in these books he also encounters new words that he incorporates; his philosophy becomes more and more universal; effortlessly he overcomes the

onesidedness of the various naifs. Of course he reflects on the various keywords and catchwords; he notices connections; he sits down and writes; the result of such a wrestling is a synthesis, that is, an essay or a pamphlet or a book in which the various words are combined dialectically. The dialectical combination of the keywords and catchwords of present-day philosophy—this and nothing else is conspectivism. That is why conspectivism is no standpoint, but rather a method; more exactly, it is a literary genre. Those books are conspectivist in which validity, value, Gestalt, stream of life, dialectics, the existing thinker, the conditions of production, Weltanschauung, structure, ontology, etc., etc., move in a bacchantic whirl.<sup>6</sup>

In order to write such books, one needs a peculiar style. Characteristic of the conspectivist style are, for instance, sentences containing a “without”; one would write, say: “without underestimating the great significance of Hegelianism, one will have enough of a critical conscience to concede that this philosophy does not fully satisfy the demands of an existential worldview.” Also, adjectives ending in *-haft* are necessary in conspectivist prose; while the naïf uses the {369} adjectives ending in *-haft* only in words like *fabelhaft* or *grauenhaft*,<sup>7</sup> etc., it is the concern of the conspectivist author to develop “*gestalthaft*,” “*bildhaft*,” “*raumhaft*,”<sup>8</sup> etc., for everyday use. These indications may suffice for now. Let me just add that the conspectivist style has exercised a fruitful effect on the language of the educated. If a merchant, judge, or physician because of his attitude somehow finds himself incapable of opting for a certain worldview, or if he somehow finds a metaphysical grounding in absolute values to be required, then he owes the possibility for this to the conspectivist authors.

Only now, “*ex post*,” has Karl Mannheim developed the program of conspectivism long dominating the practice of philosophic authorship.<sup>9</sup> What is better called conspectivism, he calls “dynamic synthesis.” One would do Mannheim an injustice if one were to describe him without qualification as a conspectivist thinker. In his book *Ideology and Utopia* (here being reviewed) one finds a whole number of naive remarks stemming from direct contact with the problems that still await conspectivist reworking. Mannheim’s book is to be counted among the conspectivist literature not so much because it is itself conspectivist in form, but because, as already said, it develops the program of conspectivism for the first time. That is why we have to take a different position toward it than toward the properly conspectivist literature; we shall therefore review it not on the basis of conspectivism, but on the basis of naive thinking and in naive seriousness.

Mannheim’s book, which beckons the reader with its interesting subjects—the three treatises of which it consists are titled “Ideology and Utopia,” “Is Politics as a Science Possible? (The Problem of Theory and Practice),” “The Utopian Consciousness”—is daunting at first for its wealth of technical expressions, arousing

<sup>6</sup>Strauss’s German sentence reads: *Konspektiv sind jene Bücher, in denen die Geltung, der Wert, die Gestalt, der Lebensstrom, die Dialektik, der existierende Denker, die Produktionsverhältnisse, die Weltanschauung, die Struktur, die Ontologie usw. in bacchantischem Tummel sich bewegen.*

<sup>7</sup>*Fabelhaft* means “fabulous”; *grauenhaft* means “dreadful.”

<sup>8</sup>These terms mean something like “Gestalt-like,” “image-like,” and “space-like.”

<sup>9</sup>The German is *Schriftstellerei*, which can have the pejorative meaning of “scribbling” (in the sense of “hack writing”).

admiration and fear. It just teems with “structural,” “categorical apparatus,” “outlook,” “situation,” “synthesis,” “deliberation,” “ontology,” etc. This expenditure of technical terms would be tolerable, perhaps even necessary, if it were in the service of conceptual precision. But an expression such as “categorical apparatus” is precisely *not* possible strictly speaking. Why Mannheim embellishes the word “decision,” which has long been recognized and accepted as a technical term {370}, with the epithet “ontological,” why he says “lived ontic” instead of “life,” remains unintelligible so long as one has not yet noticed how little precision there is in Mannheim’s writing in general. He speaks of a sociological—that is, social-*scientific*—link (137) when he should speak about a social link at most. He speaks of the solution of a synthesis (122) when he means the solution of the task to produce a synthesis. Ellipses of this sort do not become more tolerable by being counterbalanced with pleonasms such as “in the truly ultimate end” and “unsparing relentlessness.” When Mannheim says, “It could not...be our task *this time* to solve problems once and for all,” one would like to call out to him: “but next time, please.” But in doing so one has to be prepared that what will matter to him next time is being right; for he declares programmatically that he does “not” want “to conceal” the “contradictions, for being right does not matter *for now*” (5). A sentence such as the following highlights his syntax: “For magical times one would of course not be so intellectualist as to assume that on account of epistemological considerations the magical ‘system of order’ has disappeared...” (57). “*on a completely new manner*” (124)<sup>10</sup> is also not quite impeccable grammar. “*Chairos*” (201) is presumably formed from *Kairos* by analogy with *Chaos*–*Kaos*; the fact that the word is emphasized in print, and therefore could not easily be overlooked on a proof-page, speaks decisively against the hypothesis that we are dealing with a printer’s error. The enumeration of the formal shortcomings of Mannheim’s book could be continued indefinitely; the examples cited will suffice to justify the assertion that reflects one’s first impression: that this book has not been written with the requisite care. Yet this is, if you will, the author’s business only. It is the reader’s task to keep to what is worthy of attention, something that can be found in the book nonetheless. Worthy of special attention are *the* thoughts of Mannheim’s, which may be summarized as follows.

The fact that there are various, opposing philosophical and political parties incapable of convincing one another was also known previously, under quite different conditions than today. But previously this fact was interpreted differently than it is today. Previously one drew from it, for instance, *the* consequence that prior generations had chosen a wrong approach, that it was therefore necessary to take a new path to *the* {371} truth, the truth valid for all human beings and times. One put a new system in place of the existing systems, which might have fundamentally differed as to method and form from the previous systems but which was for that reason no less—a system. This possibility no longer exists today. The lasting insight of the 19th century is the insight into the historical and social conditionality of all systems: there is no free-floating thought, all thought is bound to *its* historical and social place. But

<sup>10</sup> Strauss’s point is that this phrase is grammatically incorrect. Mannheim writes “*auf einer ganz neuartigen Weise*,” which is in the dative, whereas the preposition *auf* in this idiom should take the accusative: “*auf eine ganz neuartige Weise*.”

does not knowing thereby lose its meaning? No—it merely fundamentally changes its meaning. It gives up chasing the chimera of timeless truths; it understands that its meaning lies in understanding the present, present-day life, the social situation from which it stems. The place of metaphysics is taken over by the “sociological diagnosis of the time,” the “analysis of the situation,” the “report on the situation.” This science grows out of the understanding of ourselves and our world that is given with our life itself; it unfolds when we question the particular and narrowminded viewpoint that we hold initially with the other, equally partial and narrowminded viewpoints that are effective in the same social and historical space. In carrying out this confrontation we are on the way to the only possible totality, to the total understanding of our situation. At every moment, we must guard ourselves against the previously gained insight’s positing itself as absolute, against our fleeing into a system that reassures us by blocking the horizon from us. The inclination to such absolutizing is admittedly given with human nature, with our thinking and acting. “But this is precisely the function of historical research...in our epoch, to keep rescinding these inevitable...self-hypostasizings and to keep relativizing the self-deification in a constant countermovement, thereby forcing us to be open to the addition” (40).

At this point the question becomes urgent to the reader: how indeed is the addition supposed to happen? Mannheim answers: through the other *present-day* viewpoints. But who says that an adequate understanding of the present situation is indeed achieved through the “dynamic synthesis” of viewpoints, however successful, which exist at present? Can the possibility be ruled out from the start that all these interpretations may be blind to the same fundamental facts; that one thus never even encounters these fundamental facts if one orients oneself from the beginning only by these viewpoints? {372} Mannheim presupposes further that the various present-day viewpoints are *equivalent* (40: “now there are too many equivalent positions, even intellectually equally powerful ones, which mutually relativize themselves...”). His proof of this equivalence is that from each of these positions one sees facts that one does not see, or at least does not see *in that way*, from the other positions. But are all facts equally important? Are all aspects equally radical? What determines importance and radicality? The totality! Now Mannheim assumes that only that viewpoint is total that as a “synthesis” does justice to all the others. But can it be ruled out from the start that the total viewpoint might be supremely “unjust”? In order to know which facts must be at the center of a total viewpoint, one must know which facts *are* central; but one does not come to know this by pitting the viewpoints dominant at present against one another. Here Mannheim’s premature judgment of Ranke’s “obliviousness”<sup>11</sup> (63) comes back to haunt him; Ranke said: “All the heresies of the world will not teach you what Christianity is—one can come to know it only by reading the Gospel.” This sentence is neither naive nor ominous, but simply true. If one understands that thought is conditioned by the situation, it does not follow that one cannot come to see the situation originally, free of the dominant viewpoints. This freedom does not fall into anyone’s lap; it must be won by understanding the tradition as such in which we are caught up. Admittedly, this tradition cannot be seen clearly

<sup>11</sup> Ger.: *Ahnungslosigkeit*. In Strauss’s next sentence, “oblivious” is *ahnungslos* and “ominous” is *ahnungsvoll*.

if—as Mannheim does throughout—one orients oneself only by the more recent centuries. When Mannheim takes premodern developments into consideration, then only “traditionalism” in contrast to modern “rationalism,” the “medieval-Christian objective unity of the world” in contrast to the “Enlightenment’s absolutized unity of the subject,” or at the most the “magical system” and “the prophets”: in Mannheim’s book, which poses the question of the meaning of science, specifically of the possibility of politics as a science, the foundations of our scientific tradition which lie in Greek antiquity are forgotten! Of all people it is *Mannheim*, who desires and hopes that the history of word meanings “will be researched at the level of methodological exactness possible at present” (38), who is guilty of this omission. {373}

But let us disregard the lack of “methodical exactness,” of “philological precision” (1), this failure to answer demands that Mannheim himself makes; let us further suppose that in fact every analysis of a situation that is possible in that situation is “somehow” a “synthesis” of the extreme positions effective in this situation: is it permissible therefore to make this *fate* of all research into the *principle* of research? Mannheim speaks of the danger that lies in the “false contemplation of the researching stance” vis-à-vis political practice. Well—the same danger exists vis-à-vis scientific practice. Mannheim, who at many points is brushing the outer limits of liberalism—by incorporating illiberal elements into the liberalism that in fact has a hold on him by means of a “dynamic synthesis”—does not in truth overstep these limits. (Particularly interesting in this respect is Mannheim’s interpretation of fascism, which we cannot enter into here.) We say: liberalism has a hold on Mannheim, and we are justified inasmuch as it is the essence of liberalism to elevate insights gained in a contemplative attitude to principles of practice.

The “analysis of situation” sought by Mannheim does not want to be “value free.” It is aware that the will to know *what is*, this will that forbids every escape and every lie, contains a “value judgment”; that given with our life already, from which this situation analysis arises, are valuing, taking a stance, praising and blaming; that it is possible only on the basis of a “decision” guiding the eye, illuminating the horizon. This “decision” stands at the beginning; not, however, as an axiom from which anything one likes can be inferred, but as an implicit drive to question, which becomes explicit, understood, tested, and doubted in carrying out the confrontation. Thus, the analysis of situation that is always grounded in a “decision,” succeeds in the unveiling of ideologies by showing for what they are “outdated and outlived norms and forms of thought, but also worldviews” that do not clarify the present situation but conceal it (51). A “decision” underlies the “sociological diagnosis of the time” that seeks a “dynamic synthesis,” and in particular underlies the “politics as science in the form of a political sociology” (143) also demanded by Mannheim, namely, the decision for a politics of the center, whose support is to be the “socially free-floating intelligence.” The {374} stratum of intellectuals that is—according to Mannheim’s thesis—the support of the “spirit” is the “predestined advocate of the intellectual interests of the whole.” This stratum is not a class; it owes its unity not to its economic situation but to “education.” The intellectuals, who as individuals are conditioned by class and always remain within certain limits, have in their education “a homogeneous medium” in which the heterogeneous class tendencies can confront each other; the intellectual struggle made possible by education is a

“downsized image” of the class struggles. The result of this confrontation is expected to be a “total orientation” about the social situation, as it cannot be reached from the extreme standpoints of classes and parties; but not a “politics peculiar to intellectuals,” which would hardly be possible in the time of mass movements. The stratum of intellectuals has the possibility and the “mission” of anticipating intellectually and thus beginning a “dynamic mediation” between the classes opposed to each other, between the “ruthless representatives of yesterday’s principles” and the “one-sided emphasis on the day to come” (121–34). We leave undecided whether this type of influence on politics is possible at all in the present situation; we only point out an allusion that Mannheim makes in the context of his treatise on politics as a science,<sup>12</sup> an allusion whose momentousness is deplorably at odds with how little it is developed. We recall the significance of the distinction between an ethics of intention and an ethics of responsibility for Max Weber.<sup>13</sup> Unless we are mistaken, the insight into this distinction was the deepest and strongest motive for his conviction that it is impossible to decide scientifically between opposing moral principles; for here two irreducible, unjustifiable, unconditional possibilities of human behavior seemed to face each other, compelling each human being to face an either/or. There is no doubt: Max Weber faced *this* choice. Are we still facing it today? If we comprehend correctly the remark that Mannheim makes at the conclusion of his second treatise,<sup>14</sup> then he is of the opinion that the ethics of intention is no eternal possibility, but *one* stage in the history of humanity, destined to be overcome by the ethics of responsibility that Max Weber professed. But if that is the case, is not the meaning of “decision” fundamentally changed? Do not then the questions that Mannheim asks himself have to be asked entirely differently? This question leads back to the {375} more fundamental question of how the world in which science emerged looked before the incursion of the biblical consciousness. Only by orienting ourselves by this world can we gain the horizon in which alone we can radically question and answer henceforth. In orienting ourselves by this world we would also see that, under Mannheim’s implicit presuppositions, one would have to inquire not into the possibility and necessity of utopia, but into the possibility and necessity of planning. But Mannheim utterly lacks precisely this orientation.

<sup>12</sup>I.e., in “Is Politics as a Science Possible? (The Problem of Theory and Practice).”

<sup>13</sup>See Max Weber, “Politics as a Vocation,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 120: “We must be clear about the fact that all ethically oriented conduct may be guided by one of two fundamentally differing and irreconcilably opposed maxims: conduct can be oriented to an ‘ethics of intention’ or to an ‘ethics of responsibility’ [‘gesinnungsethisch’ oder ‘verantwortungsethisch’ orientiert]. This is not to say that an ethics of intention [Gesindeethik] is identical with irresponsibility, or that an ethics of responsibility [Verantwortungsethik] is identical with unprincipled opportunism. Naturally, nobody says that. However, there is a gaping contrast between conduct that follows the maxim of an ethics of intention—that is, in religious terms, ‘The Christian does rightly and leaves the results with the Lord’—and conduct that follows the maxim of an ethics of responsibility, in which case one has to give an account of the foreseeable results of one’s action.” Translation modified. See Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, ed. Johannes Winckelmann (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1971), 551–52. Cf. also NRH 69ff.

<sup>14</sup>I.e., of “Is Politics as A Science Possible? (The Problem of Theory and Practice).”